

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

28 November 2013

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Stapleton, J. (2013) 'Chesterton at the Daily News.', *The Chesterton review.*, 39 (1/2). pp. 49-62.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.5840/chesterton2013391/210>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Chesterton at the Daily News.

Julia Stapleton

Julia Stapleton is Reader in Politics at the University of Durham. She is the editor of *G.K. Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution*, 8 Volumes (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012). The following is an expanded version of the paper she gave at the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture conference on 'Chesterton at the Daily News' at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, Pall Mall, London, November 2012.

2013 marks the centenary of the end of Chesterton's association with the *Daily News*, the leading Liberal daily newspaper of Edwardian Britain. His last regular article appeared on 1 February 1913, and the parting was not a happy one. Chesterton had mortally offended the proprietor, George Cadbury, in his satirical poem on cocoa-drinkers published in *The Eye-Witness*. Wisely, he resigned before he was sacked, and not out of consideration for his curriculum vitae either; rather, he insisted that no-one would dictate to him what he could and could not write in other newspapers.¹

But he left behind a considerable archive of essays, both literary and political. In addition, he wrote numerous letters to the editor in which he engaged vigorously with his critics and lent support to other correspondents and writers who shared his beliefs. In total, there are some 750 items, two thirds of which have not been disturbed since their original publication. Some may feel that salvage operations on so sprawling an old wreck should now cease; Chesterton's mind is sufficiently well known to make further recovery superfluous. There came a point – quite early on – at which even his contemporaries grew tired of his endless paradoxes and witticisms, to say nothing of his garrulous style.² However, against

¹ See Julia Stapleton, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood: The England of G.K. Chesterton* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009), p. 112.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

this view there are four compelling reasons why Chesterton's writings for the *Daily News* deserve re-publication in their entirety. First, they constitute a body of literature that merits consideration as a whole. Second, they shed much light on Chesterton's role as a popular journalist for the Liberal press and the audiences he served. Third, they represent a neglected but important strand of Edwardian Liberalism, one that was closely allied with radicalism, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other. Fourth, the controversies in which they were immersed are by no means a spent force.

Chesterton's *Daily News* articles as a literary whole.

First, it is important to recognise the limitations of the partial re-publication of Chesterton's *Daily News* articles that has taken place to date. Mostly, this occurred in Chesterton's lifetime and that of his indefatigable secretary Dorothy Collins, who died in 1988.³ A few more essays have appeared subsequently, most notably in *The Chesterton Review* and in *Gilbert*, the magazine of the American Chesterton Society.

The principles of selection in the case of Chesterton and Miss Collins are interesting in themselves. Appearing so soon after original publication, it is clear that many of the essays collected by Chesterton were included for their immediate relevance, on the one hand, and their interest to a wider circle of readers than those of the *Daily News*, on the other. By contrast, Miss Collins was more concerned to emphasise the enduring nature of Chesterton's thought; she therefore selected his least controversial pieces for re-publication. In both cases, the original context is lost from sight, made worse by Miss Collins's practice of excising all reference to the events, writers and personalities that had triggered the pieces. The incomplete nature of the republication that has taken place hitherto, together with the loss of the wider historical context, has obscured the battle that Chesterton fought with the political establishment during his time at the newspaper. But the details of that war are essential for a full understanding his religious and political ideas.

³ Although he brought together just three volumes of *Daily News* articles himself if his early volume of biographical essays *Twelve Types* (1902) and its American equivalent *Varied Types* (1905) are discounted, both containing essays written for other newspapers as well. These are *Tremendous Trifles* (1909); *Alarms and Discursions* (1910); and *A Miscellany of Men* (1912).

Other anthologists have also engaged in 'cherry-picking' exercises, often resulting in the publication of selected passages of selected essays.⁴ These have served to introduce new readers to Chesterton; however, they don't begin to reflect the range of his interests, the cross-currents between different aspects of his thought, and the degree of his radicalism in what was undoubtedly the period of his best writing.

The *Daily News* and Chesterton as a writer and journalist.

The second importance of the *Daily News* essays concerns the light they shed on Chesterton as a leading journalist and writer in Edwardian Britain and the audience he served.

As a *Daily News* contributor, he is best known for his Saturday 'pulpit' as he described his column in his autobiography, where he held forth on all manner of subjects under the watchful eye of A.G. Gardiner, the editor from 1902. However, his regular Saturday column did not commence until April 1903 (and only in 1904 was his column moved to the central, editorial page). Before then he was most prominent as a book reviewer for the paper – the first dozen or so of his reviews were unsigned – and literary essayist. He continued to appear on the book review pages long after his Saturday column had commenced; in turn, the Saturday column often took the form of a literary essay. Indeed, it was primarily through the creative imagination – encompassing literature, art and history – that Chesterton reached out to his readers and also developed his creed. In doing so, he is best situated in the mainstream tradition of English criticism as it had developed since Addison. As George Watson has pointed out, literary criticism in England had abandoned the use of a technical language for studying literary works after the Elizabethans, increasingly focusing instead on appraisal. In different ways this was aimed at the readers of poetry and literature rather than poets and writers themselves.⁵ The strong tradition of moralism that informed English criticism since the eighteenth century is particularly resonant

⁴ The most recent is Bevis Hillier (ed.), *The Wit and Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Continuum, 2010).

⁵ George Watson, *The Literary Critics: A Study of English Descriptive Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

in Chesterton's literary work, not least through the influence of Samuel Johnson and his presumption of a critical standard common to mankind. This would have been reinforced by W.P. Ker's lectures at University College London that he attended on leaving the Slade School of Art. They introduced him to a form of literary history with a clear Christian narrative.

Chesterton's place in this tradition of literary criticism, at once descriptive, evaluative, and historical, and its centrality in English culture shaped his wider role as a writer. Even when his essays were not overtly literary, they were overflowing with literary references, including biblical references. This is striking because a large proportion of his readers had received little more than an elementary education, if that. They were mostly self-educated in this, the golden age of the autodidact.⁶ But there was much that he could safely assume of them, and rightly so in his opinion. He regarded literature as a common possession and never more so than in the era of cheap books; luxury editions as embraced by John Ruskin and William Morris were not for him.⁷ Furthermore, he wrote on the cusp of the nineteenth century when literature embraced philosophy, theology, science, and history as well as poetry and fiction. This ensured a wide acquaintance with texts and ideas at first hand.⁸

What kind of reviewer was he? There were clearly *some* books he had not read in any great depth; and like Dr. Johnson, he was sparing in his textual references. Most, however, caught his imagination at some level and he was generous in his praise. At the same time, his criticism could be devastating, especially when – in his view – the book under review expressed or supported 'advanced' views.

One such book was Stopford Brooke's *Studies in Poetry* in 1907. While he could admire the 'quiet style and aesthetic sanity' of

⁶ See Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁷ 'Sixpence at the Bookstalls', 25 May 1904, *Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) (hereafter CDN), 2, pp. 232–4.

⁸ Lionel Trilling, 'The Function of the Little Magazine', in *The Liberal Imagination* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), p. 95; see also W.C. Lubenow, *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815-1914: Making Words Flesh* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2010).

Brooke's essays, he baulked at Brooke's praise for the 'wilder' poems of Shelley and Blake, those that celebrated sexual freedom in particular. With Shelley's 'priggish fancies', he maintained, people would have nothing to do, particularly in the light of Shelley's record of serial adultery. 'Men are right', he asserted, 'in distrusting the lawlessness of the very pure'.⁹

'The lawlessness of the very pure'. This put-down to the literary avant-garde was classic Chesterton, using paradox to reveal the truth: in this case, that it was the enemies, not the friends of convention who were the real prigs in modern society. It was all of a piece with his attack on 'snobbery' in a large number of essays, snobbery in Thackeray's sense of 'admiring mean things meanly'.¹⁰ For Chesterton, the obverse of snobbery was democracy, but not conceived in a narrow, political sense; it consisted instead of a belief in equality, on the one hand, and a defence of the customs, sentiments, beliefs, tastes, emotions and passions of ordinary humanity, on the other.

He believed that both aspects of the democratic creed were threatened by a far-reaching cult of 'the few' in literature and thought, in works by Nietzsche and Tolstoy, especially. He maintained that in rejecting law and convention both sought to exalt a higher form of reason against the more balanced form of reason common to all mankind that had been upheld by writers of the previous century.¹¹

But it was the writers associated with the Decadence who most drew his ire. Chesterton lost no opportunity to denounce their efforts to belittle the human race with its insufferable optimism about existence, even when enduring the worst kinds of misery. One such

⁹ 'The Poetic View of Poetry', review of Stopford A. Brooke, *Studies in Poetry* (1907), 11 December 1907, CDN, 4, pp. 370–3.

¹⁰ See, for example, 'The New Snobs', 18 April 1903, CDN, 2, pp. 48–51.

¹¹ 'The "Good Man" of the Eighteenth Century', 22 March 1901, review of Charles A. Whittuck, *The 'Good Man' of the Eighteenth Century: A Monograph on XVIIth Century Didactic Literature* (1901), CDN, 1, pp. 63–7

writer was Edgar Saltus, the only American Decadent, whose supercilious 'wit and wisdom' he pierced in a review of 1903.¹²

Against the writers of the Decadence, he elevated Charlotte Brontë and Walt Whitman, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and R.L. Stevenson, to say nothing of Dickens among the major figures he admired, all of them quintessentially mid-Victorians. In the Index of Names to *Chesterton at the Daily News*, Dickens has one of the highest number of entries, second only to Kipling and Joseph Chamberlain, who he never ceased to castigate in this period. To these he added minor figures such as his fellow St. Paulian, Cosmo Lang, and Roden Noel, father of his friend the 'red' clergyman Conrad Noel.

The appeal of these mid-Victorian writers lay in the finger they kept constantly on the pulse of the universe and their identity with all mankind as a result, not just those whom they believed were destined to lead. A romantic bent was of their essence, something which Chesterton defined in 1901 with reference to Stevenson as 'the vision of the possibilities of things' and from the appreciation of which no-one was excluded. By contrast, realism dwelt in the realm of 'mere occurrences';¹³ try as its advocates might – and there were those such as John Davidson, who did try hard – they could not generate a poetry of matter equivalent to the poetry of the soul integral to romanticism.

The fact was that 'Realism' in literature and drama was suffused with pessimism and morbidity; no amount of George Bernard Shaw's exaltation of the 'life-force' could relieve it of this heavy, oppressive weight.¹⁴ In this, Chesterton was locked in conflict regularly with the *Daily News's* theatre critics: Edward Baughan and William Archer. Against their championship of Ibsen, Shaw, Arthur Pinero and other modern 'realists', he sided with a dying breed of critics such as

¹² 'The Philosophy of Hair Dressers', review of *Wit and Wisdom from Edgar Saltus* (1902), 13 June 1903, CDN, 2, pp. 78–81.

¹³ 'The Mistake about Stevenson', 14 March 1901, review of H. Bellyse Baildon, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study in Criticism*, CDN, 1, p. 55.

¹⁴ 'The Adoration of Matter', review of John E. Davidson, *The Theatrocrat: A Tragic Play of Church and Stage* (1905), 21 December 1905, CDN, 3, p. 257.

Clement Scott who defended the clear preference of the theatre-going public for melodramas. That public sustained the 'festive' spirit in which the theatre had been born, unlike the supporters of realism. In an essay of 1902 which is worth quoting at length, he wrote:

The theatre is nothing if it is not joyful; the theatre is nothing if it is not sensational; the theatre is nothing if it is not theatrical. A play may be happy, it may be sad, it may be wild, it may be quiet, it may be tragic, it may be comic, but it must be festive. It must be something which works men up to a point, something which is passionate and abrupt and exceptional, something which makes them feel, however gross the phrase may seem, that they have in reality got a shilling's worth of emotion. It must be a festival. It must, in modern phraseology, be a 'treat'. To the primitive Greek the loud, wild praise of Dionysus was a treat. To the modern child the pantomime of 'Cinderella' is a treat. The true meaning of the theatre is thoroughly expressed in both. If it is a treat, a festival, it matters nothing whether it is comic or tragic, realistic or idealistic, Ibsenite or Rostandesque, happy or pitiful: it is a play. If it is 'like life', if it represents the dull and throbbing routine of our actual life and exhibits only the emotions with which we commonly regard it, the internal merit matters nothing; it is not a play. That is the damning, but neglected, error of so much modern realistic drama; the play fails to be a festival, and therefore fails to be a play.¹⁵

This was in keeping with Chesterton's championship of the 'penny dreadful' in popular literature.¹⁶ It was also consistent with the issue he took with middle-class organisations such as the Street Noise Abatement Committee, which sought to curb noise levels in London streets. One of the most repeated quotations throughout his articles is from the Book of Job: the 'sons of God shouting for joy'. On behalf of barrel-organ grinders and street sellers and a multitude of other so-called 'social nuisances' among the poor everywhere, he filed one article in 1906 entitled 'The Beauty of Noise'.¹⁷

¹⁵ 'The Meaning of the Theatre', 8 January 1902, CDN, 1, pp. 304–7.

¹⁶ 'Eulogy of Robin Hood', 6 June 1903, CDN, 2, p. 74.

¹⁷ 'The Beauty of Noise', 18 August 1906, CDN, 4, pp. 38–40.

What he liked about noise was the faith it expressed in the purposefulness of the universe. This was something which the mid-Victorian writers possessed in abundance. He maintained that it was integral not just to the substance but the *form* of their literary imagination, too. Browning's notoriously difficult metre, he insisted, was not just an 'add-on' to his thought, as one critic claimed in 1901; it was inseparable from his religious ideas. He compared the form of Browning's poetry to medieval cathedrals, 'unbridled fantasies in stone [where] we find the swell and triumph of the great principles of engineering'. A resounding hymn of praise to God from the whole chorus of creation could be found in both Browning's poetry and medieval cathedrals.¹⁸ The hapless author in this case was none other than the future founder of welfare economics, A.G. Pigou. He never wrote a line of literary criticism ever again.

This critique of modern writers for separating form and substance was part of Chesterton's wider offensive against the fragmentation of human interests in modern life: once simply different aspects of a broader, unifying creed, psychology, morality, metaphysics and art were now cultivated 'for their own sakes'. The 'ethical societies' movement was a case in point.¹⁹ But it was the movement of art in this direction that most exercised him. This was the legacy of the *fin de siècle* movement, and Chesterton took it back beyond Walter Pater to the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Reviewing a book by Peter Forsyth, a prominent Congregationalist minister and theologian in 1902, he discounted any suggestion that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood held the key to restoring the religious spirit to art, as Forsyth hoped. On the contrary, their paintings were the living embodiment of the spirit of doubt. 'Burne-Jones', he commented, 'paints the gods carousing on Olympus with the faces of the members of the suicide club. He described Rossetti's 'Annunciation' as 'a terrible piece of pessimism'; it portrayed a 'decadent Madonna who distrusts her own joys even before they come'. The problem was that the medieval painters before Raphael sought to bring art into religion; by contrast, their Victorian imitators merely sought to bring religion into art. It was another example of

¹⁸ 'Browning and his Ideal', 19 August 1901, review of A.C. Pigou, *Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher* (1900), CDN, I, pp. 167–71.

¹⁹ 'On Fragments', 31 March 1906, CDN, 3, pp. 334–6.

the futility of the modern search for purity, matching that of Tolstoy in literature and Shelley in poetry.²⁰

Thus for Chesterton literary criticism was both a powerful weapon of controversy and a conduit of democratic values and beliefs. In both respects it was the natural ally of liberalism. What kind of liberalism fuelled his work as both a literary essayist and political commentator? How was it related to his call for revolution, on the one hand, and his embrace of Christianity, on the other? This is the third aspect of Chesterton's *Daily News* output considered here.

Liberalism and revolution.

The Liberalism that Chesterton upheld fiercely throughout his time at the *Daily News* did not consist in what he termed in 1905 a preference for broad-mindedness, progress, and thinking what one likes. It was instead rooted in certain doctrines which were 'neither universal, nor self-evident'. These amounted to a belief in religious liberty, equality, and the self-governing State.²¹

Chesterton regarded all these doctrines as on the defensive in the early years of the twentieth century, and against certain strains within liberalism itself. Turning first to religious liberty, its place in a new form of progressive liberalism was uncertain. As Peter Clarke's pioneering study of the 'New Liberalism' demonstrated, the fortunes of the Liberal party in Lancashire improved dramatically when social reform displaced religion as the main battleground of elections.²² Hitherto, the Conservatives had done well in the North West, not least because of the identification of many recently enfranchised voters there with the Church of England. The success of Liberal progressives in moving Liberalism closer to the class issues associated with a nascent Labour party enabled the Liberals to win Conservative seats. But this was accompanied by indifference, if not hostility towards religion *per se*, not just the role of Anglicanism in

²⁰ 'Art and the Churches', 2 January 1902, review of P.T. Forsyth, 'Religion in Recent Art', CDN, 1, pp. 300–303.

²¹ 'Bigotry versus Intolerance', 18 February 1905, CDN, 3, p. 38.

²² P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

maintaining the hold of the Conservative Party on the North West. For example, the leading Liberal progressive and editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott, voted against the Balfour Education Act of 1902, despite pressure from his constituents in Leigh, Roman Catholics in particular, to support it.²³ There were, of course, party considerations, and only one Liberal M.P. – R.B. Haldane – voted for it. However, the Act provided grants for religious teaching in Church schools, to which Scott's rationalist cast of mind can be presumed unsympathetic.

But the mainstay of opposition to the Act was Nonconformist Liberals under the leadership of John Clifford, who were outraged at the prospect of 'Rome on the Rates'.²⁴ This was a further strand of liberalism that in Chesterton's view endangered religious liberty. While Chesterton also opposed the Bill, he dissociated himself from Clifford. For Chesterton, Clifford's vendetta against supporters of the Act savoured of bigotry. He defined this as assailing one's opponents not on grounds of what they actually believe but on some other, usually spurious ground. Thus, Clifford denounced supporters of the Act as 'Papists' and all Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics as lacking in civic spirit. As Chesterton pointed out, this was hard to credit in relation to the Duke of Norfolk, Lord Halifax, Henry Scott-Holland, Lord Killowen and many other paragons of good citizenship among the religious communities which Clifford attacked.²⁵

Against Clifford's call for 'undenominationalism' in religious education, Chesterton favoured a 'secular solution'. But unlike Liberal progressives who adopted the same stance, his chief concern was for religious liberty. He believed that it was only through excluding religion from education that freedom of religion could be guaranteed.²⁶ When the new Liberal Government of 1906 sought to

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁴ The best account of the Act and its context in the revitalisation of traditional forms of Christianity at the expense of Nonconformity towards the end of the nineteenth century is still Elie Halévy, *Imperialism and the Rise of Labour* (1926; London, Ernest Benn, 1951), Part II, chapter 1, especially pp. 183-89.

²⁵ 'Dr. Clifford and the "No Popery" Cry', letter to the editor, 24 September 1902, CDN, 1, p. 392.

²⁶ 'The Secular Solution', letter to the editor, 12 May 1905, CDN, 3, p. 98-101

reverse the 1902 Act by requiring all maintained schools to teach 'undenominational' religion, Chesterton argued that church schools should be exempt.²⁷

Similarly, he opposed the King's Declaration in the Coronation Oath when it was debated on the death of Edward VII in 1910. His grounds were that the Declaration – requiring the monarch to denounce the Roman Catholic belief in transubstantiation – offended Liberalism as much as Catholicism. No other public servant, he argued, was required to make such a Declaration. In this respect, it was clearly discriminatory.²⁸

In defending religious liberty, Chesterton regarded Liberalism as the safeguard of Christianity, that is Christianity of a Catholic rather than sectarian kind. This was important because, in turn, Christianity was the ally of Liberalism in furthering the cause of radicalism. He believed that the secularist claim on radicalism would fail radicalism badly. While he may have embraced a 'secular solution' in education, he was a vehement opponent of *secularism*. Removing the King's Declaration from the Coronation Oath (to uphold Christianity) would still leave the Christian state intact.

Towards the end of his time at the *Daily News*, Chesterton pressed hard on the message of deliverance that Christianity uniquely offered mankind in accordance with its doctrine of immortality. This followed from his keen engagement with an assortment of determinists and fatalists in his early years with the newspaper, from Blatchford and other representatives of nineteenth century rationalism to the new vogue for Eastern religions. These were embraced avidly by Aleister Crowley, Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, to name but a few of their adherents.

Chesterton was especially concerned with the deliverance of the poor from 'the yoke of this world'.²⁹ This took the form of 'the Monstrosity', the state of 'swollen decay' that characterised the England of his day. At its root was the State. In his words, 'every

²⁷ "Something to Avoid", 28 April 1906, CDN, 3, pp. 355-6, especially n. 4.

²⁸ 'The King's Declaration', letter to the editor, 13 June 1910, CDN, 6, pp. 265-7.

²⁹ 'The Unicorn', 4 November 1911, CDN, 7, p. 238.

function of the State has grown more formless and more vast'.³⁰ It was a tendency made worse by a Liberal government bent on state-sponsored social reform. As a result, equality and self-government – the two other components of Liberalism that he had outlined in 1905 – were losing the importance they had once had in Liberalism.

Compared to the present, the Edwardian state appears slim, neat and trim. But Chesterton was anxious about what Beatrice Webb embraced as the new 'social service state', specifically what he regarded as the 'ant-heap' model of society on which it was based. He raged against the increasing persecution of the poor by the authorities, not least for child neglect.³¹ Against the ant-heap model of society he elevated the mammalian model where the young are bred in families, not colonies as with insects.³²

A new culture of regulation and control in early-twentieth century Britain seemed evident to Chesterton, from the Children's Act of 1908 to the National Insurance Act, 1911 and most notorious of all, the Mental Deficiency Act two years later. Equally disturbing were developments in the criminal justice system. One of the most striking features of Chesterton's articles from 1908 onwards is the close, indeed obsessive interest he took in penal matters. The trigger was the passing of the Prevention of Crime Act of that year, enabling judges to pass indeterminate sentences; these permitted the detention of 'habitual' offenders until they were deemed to be 'cured' of their vices.³³ A firm believer in retribution as the end of punishment, he came close to embracing Foucault's view of power as a discipline of the modern state that has no function beyond discipline itself. The Act provoked one of his most devastating pieces of satirical wit, 'A Dialogue on Justice', 1911.³⁴ It also fuelled his distrust of experts on whom the modern state relied increasingly.

³⁰ 'The Monstrosity', 11 March 1911, CDN, 7, pp. 88-90.

³¹ 'The Insane Quiet', 18 February 1911, CDN, 7, pp. 77-80; and 'The Monstrosity'.

³² 'The Worship of the Insect', 7 March 1903, CDN, 2, pp. 18-21. Beatrice Webb was the inspiration behind Lady Hypatia Hagg in Chesterton's hilarious spoof article, 'How I found the Superman', 5 December 1908, CDN, 5, pp. 222-5.

³³ 'A Theory of Tyrants', 13 June 1908, CDN, 5, p. 89.

³⁴ 'A Dialogue on Justice', 4 February 1911, CDN, 7, pp. 69-71.

In this vein, Chesterton protested against the questionable evidence on which the death sentence was passed on Stinie Morrison – a young, immigrant baker convicted of murder in 1911. This was the subject of a trenchant ‘letter to the editor’ by him that, unusually, was published on the front page of the newspaper.³⁵ The next day, the King – on the advice of Winston Churchill, then Home Secretary - issued a pardon enabling the sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment.

Chesterton’s distrust of experts is also apparent in his protest against the Liberal Government’s solution to the wave of strikes that spread through Britain from 1911 to the First World War: namely, official boards of inquiry and ‘reconciliation’. In his view, these were a means of burying conflict, usurping the authority that he believed belonged to what he called ‘the democracy’.³⁶

His last two years at the *Daily News* produced some of his most powerful essays, noticeably at odds with the paper’s editorial support for the Government. All through 1912, Chesterton urged his fellow countrymen to revolt against a system that was in the process of taking everything from them: their livelihood, their faith, their homes, and their country (in the name of empire). He frequently resorted to allegory to emphasise that the disputes were not merely about income, working conditions, or modern notions such as equality, as ‘advanced thinkers’ imagined. Instead, he argued that they touched something primeval: honour, leadership and the divine origins of humanity.³⁷

In the autumn of 1912 he reflected on what he called the ‘mistrust of man’ at the heart of modern life and against which, he believed, the soul of mankind had stirred. How ironic it was, he mused, that this mistrust should have occurred in the age of Swinburne, with his rousing hymn of praise to ‘Man, the master of all things’. For Chesterton, it was obvious that faith in God was the only basis of faith

³⁵ ‘The Morrison Mystery’, letter to the editor, 11 April 1911, CDN 7, pp. 106-110.

³⁶ ‘The Kind of Man’, 26 August 1911, CDN, 7, pp. 190-3.

³⁷ ‘The King’, 16 March 1912, CDN, 8, pp. 41-4.

in man. Renouncing God could only lead to impotence not mastery.³⁸ He made this clear in an evocative article entitled 'The Red Clay' written in the midst of the coal strike in the spring of 1912. It was inspired by the image in Genesis of the earth that was Adam and the potter that was God. 'Adamah' = 'red clay' in Hebrew.³⁹

The English people did not revolt; but Chesterton did. Less than a year after writing 'The Red Clay', he took his leave from the *Daily News*. In doing so, he faced down Shaw who had taunted him at a public debate in January 1913 on private property that he was the 'property of Mr. Cadbury'. In fact, his heart had long since left the paper with whose Liberal Party line he had become exasperated. In his last year – 1912 – he made no contribution to the literary page and wrote no 'letters to the editor.'

The controversies in which Chesterton was involved today.

A final ground for recovering Chesterton's contributions to the *Daily News* in whole rather than part is that many of the controversies in which he engaged continue unabated. Examples include those which centre on the power of local authorities to take children from their parents; the role of the state in shaping the minds and behaviour of children through the educational system; and the reform of the law of divorce – and recently marriage as well – to reflect particular views of the direction of social change. The growth of complex bureaucratic machines in the national state and supranational organisations expressed in the term 'quangocracy' add a new dimension to Chesterton's conception of a growing divide between the political class and the people. The contempt for national parliaments in the Eurozone by political elites in Brussels intent upon saving the Euro at all costs further underlines his concern for the erosion of democracy. His defence of the sympathies and attachments of ordinary people, patriotism especially, against their dismissal by advanced thinkers still has resonance. Recent recognition that in the absence of a shared patriotism multicultural societies will eventually break down under the strain of cultural difference concedes many of his

³⁸ 'The Mistrust of Man', 16 November 1912, CDN, 8, pp. 191–4.

³⁹ 'The Red Clay', 6 April 1912, CDN, 8, pp. 53–6.

arguments.⁴⁰ In these and other controversies, Chesterton upheld values that had deep roots in Christianity. In turn, he believed that Christianity had deep roots in the world. Secularist attempts to uproot Christianity were futile, he maintained in an article of 1907, but they could do untold damage nevertheless:

Sceptics do not succeed in pulling up the roots of Christianity; but they do succeed in pulling up the roots of every man's ordinary vine and fig tree, of every man's garden and every man's kitchen garden. Secularists have not succeeded in wrecking divine things; but Secularists have succeeded in wrecking secular things.⁴¹

Like any journalist, Chesterton could have his off-days when he struggled to think of something worthwhile to say and retain the reader's attention. He could also be singularly obtuse in giving no ground in an argument, even – perhaps especially – when at his most unpersuasive. But it is for insights such as the one in the quotation above that we should continue the work of recovering Chesterton's writings and the context which gave rise to them. For his world is still our world and his perceptiveness in identifying the destructive currents within it is precious.

⁴⁰ David Goodhart, *The British Dream* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013).

⁴¹ 'The Roots of the World', 17 August 1907, CDN, 6, pp. 53–6.